

Briefing to King County Council regarding KCACC Improvements to date – as per Motion 12737

By Carolyn Ableman, Director, Records and Licensing Services

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you improvements made by King County Animal Care and Control over the last many months. I would like to preface this list of improvements by first putting these changes into the proper context for you.

As you've heard this morning, in the Interbranch Animal Services Strategic and Operational Master Plan, the work group identified components of a model program. And while these components are ones that the agency has attempted to focus on while improving, given the resources to date, and the shelters facility limitations the agency is not portraying that they have reached model program status, by any means. In fact, I have seen no examples of open admission shelters with our staffing and resource levels that have reached in months model program status as defined in the Interbranch Strategic and Operational Plan.

Nevertheless we attempted to focus on adding as many Model program elements as we could and focused on two primary areas given the resources received through Motion 12737. The goals focused on were: 1) providing better care for the animals we need to shelter, and, 2) improving the flow of animals through the shelter by focusing on improving adoption programs. As you will see when reading the Report, the model components are represented in a graph that shows the interrelationship between these components. No one element of the program is enough on its own to even minimally accomplish what is needed to have in a model program.

For the first time in a long time, KCACC was given funds for program development staffing. With these funds, we added a volunteer coordinator, an outreach and communications specialist, an adoption/placement coordinator and additionally filled our Operations Manager, and Acting Manager Position. Most of these new positions were filled by people with long work histories and education in all facets of animal care services. Prior to April, KCACC was managed only by an acting Manager who left his own position as Operations Manager unfilled. This minimal level of management to develop programs to meet model component goals is almost unheard of in any local shelter – private or public. Nevertheless, planning for program components to provide better care, reduce euthanasia rates, and also increase adoption activities was begun in early 2008. And when the newly funded positions actually were put into place by June and July of 2008, changes happened very rapidly.

Our current Acting Manager, Wendy Keller, came to us in July with great experience in facility and CIP planning. She immediately set a plan in motion to reorganize the shelter to best meet the UC Davis requirements for medical and animal care improvements while also maximizing use of our space for better animal flow. The enhanced cleaning protocols and expanded veterinary services were already in motion, and were enhanced by the reception and installation of 100 new stainless steel cat cages. The larger size and ease of cleaning of these cages have made a huge difference in the health of our cats as

has the reorganization of cat placement, the installation of a separate negative ventilation system that prevents air borne pathogens from reentering the rest of the shelter, and the general cleaning of both shelters. There have been noticeable reductions in cats with upper respiratory infections throughout the shelter since making these changes.

At the Kent shelter, we replaced dumpsters, cleaned out excess furniture, equipment and cut underbrush in order to control potential for infestations. We added storage containers to enable better storage, control and organization of supplies, we began documenting all spot cleaning done throughout the day for dog runs and cat cages, we provided more and better dog and cat bedding and toys, and enhanced the walking of dogs and cuddling of cats significantly by reorganizing the space outside and the space inside to provide much more time out of cages and kennels for all animals. We instituted a new feeding program and partnered with Hills Science diet to provide better high protein food for our animals.

We were able to expand veterinary coverage with funding – now available 6 days/week at the Kent Shelter medical clinic. We are able to inoculate all animals entering the facility, and we perform spay/neuter operations on adult animals and blood tests on all animals prior to placement in adoption or foster homes. The new Animal Control Officers we've been allowed to hire are also in many instances licensed vet techs, so that more daily health review work can be done. We started partnering with PIMA Medical Institute for training of medical assistants supervised by veterinary instructors which has brought more medical attention to our animals on site. And PIMA is eager to place a facility on our site that would also increase the medical facilities available to our animals (clinic, x-ray equipment, blood testing, etc).

Our new volunteer coordinator is attempting to better utilize the current volunteers and increase the new volunteer base. She is attempting to set structure to allow maximum scheduling of activities and has released updated procedures and volunteer agreements. Focusing on volunteer assistance for enhancing medical care, we expanded our foster family programs. We now have well over 100+ homes this year that have cared for 500+ animals in 2008. We've filled our volunteer work schedules in Kent for dog walking, and cat cuddling so that there is a huge increase in available volunteers working with our animals waiting for new homes. The increased exercise and socialization has made an impact on the adoptability of our animals.

The offsite adoption events have expanded since we've had an adoption coordinator, and we've placed over 600 animals from offsite adoption locations alone. Overall our adoption placement percentages are at an all time high of 48.5% through the first six months of this year alone. Our adoptions have increased for many reasons. We are actively working with rescue organizations and other shelter facilities in the area to take at no charge any animals they would like to; our communications specialist is active in the community setting up regular radio, TV and newspaper advertisements and features and we've improved our own intake and solicitation efforts by requiring pictures of all our animals online, including our strays. We will continue with our outreach/adoption programs and hope to utilize the rest of our additional adoption event funds this fall with a community wide adoption event. And we are installing webcams in October that also

include a program for live online adoption/information features for both cats and dogs. And we continue to work with feral cat and barn cat programs to place as many feral cats that make their way to the shelter back into the community in a productive way.

We have struggled with finding an appropriate way of using the \$200,000 allotted for dog kennels since it is not sufficient for any onsite capital expansion of dog runs. FMD and KCACC looked long and hard for existing, rentable dog kennel facilities to expand our dog kennel space, but were unsuccessful at finding any available sites. We did improve the overall care of our dogs by enhancing our outside exercise space and dog walking programs, and fortunately this year we experienced a lower dog population than in prior years. Unfortunately the cat population has exploded for our shelter and for all the community shelters as well. We hope to repurpose these dog kennel funds to allow enhanced cat adoption placement by renting-to-own a modular building for cat adoptions that can also be next to the PIMA facility (and utilizing the same installation and setup needs) so as to free up more facility space for a better overall environment for our many animals. Currently we have our overpopulation of cats in the old cages, on the loading dock, and we want to do everything in our power to expand appropriate space for cats before the cold season is soon upon us.

We have been putting in resources into improving our use and accuracy of our chameleon animal tracking and log system and we've done this in a variety of ways: we've utilized our systems staff, chameleon staff, and our public health veterinarian to all do a variety of checks and balances on all our systems, and in developing training and education for staff in using modules; we are adding new modules as well. We are updating our system for animal tracking and id and photographing our lost animals as well as our adoptable animals, we've instituted new cage and kennel id tracking and marking systems, and we continue to work on better updating our foster family tracking system as well. We met with the County Auditor staff as soon as they were available to begin the audit process on at least the data elements within our system, but were disappointed to find that none of their audit findings will be available until spring and/or fall 2009.

The funds allowing involvement from the Public Health veterinarian, Dr. Sharon Hopkins, have been invaluable in assisting us in implementing better medical protocols and practices into many of our programs. We are still working on implementing all the advised medical protocols. Our own veterinary staff has been incredibly busy dealing with the increased population we saw after introducing the lower euthanasia standards; and we have changed our euthanasia protocols to require additional supervisory review and greater documentation on each euthanasia performed. I have here copies of a recent euthanasia log review completed by Dr. Hopkins that indicates an extremely high level of accuracy in these logs; and following that the Drug Enforcement Agency reviewed these same logs and issued a verbal report stating they are finding no issues either. DEA is still completing a surgery drug overview as well. Apparently the DEA only issues admonishment reports, if there are findings that need correction.

The areas I've mentioned have all focused on using the funds first for all the programs meeting our goals of better care for our shelter population, and for reducing animals

entering and staying in shelter by enhanced adoption programs. However, we are hoping to still utilize the funds for community spay/ neuter work. We agree with our many advisors that providing these community services can have a dramatic influence on the population of animals that often find their way to shelters. The limited funds available, and the movement of the Spay/Neuter van from Posados to Whatcom county recently, has changed our initial plan to use the van for 1-2 weekends/month if we could find the volunteer vet abilities to provide spay/neuter work. In the meantime, we plan to assist in the spay/neuter efforts by increasing our voucher amounts and negotiating lower cost spay/neuters with local veterinarians. In all options you will review in the Plan, there are proposals for increasing community spay/neuter resources as a strategy in reducing incoming shelter populations.

The additional staff funding has allowed us to slightly increase our field service resources, but we've placed our new officers in the shelter as a first priority. We have put dedicated resources into our revamped animal cruelty investigations work by providing cruelty education and one full time officer to animal cruelty cases. We've seen an increase in cases forwarded to the prosecutor; from 14 in 2007 to 8 by mid-year, 2008. We are still negotiating a better price and system for replacing our animal control trucks, box replacement. And we are still only able respond mostly to the higher priority calls which include responses to animal bites, vicious dogs and/or dogs with a biting history, injured animals, and loose livestock. The field territory for KCACC is 2000 square miles, and we have about the same number of animal control officers as the City of Seattle who has an area of 100 square miles. We are also minimally assisting only a few cities (Shoreline, Auburn and Kirkland) who had prior contracts for enhanced field services (priority calls to their city) and are hoping we're allowed to continue providing services to these cities and several other cities who have long requested enhanced field services. These enhanced services are completely paid for directly by the cities.

Finally, I am concerned about the distortion of information you're receiving from the very organized efforts out there who continue unabated to perpetuate hostility and mistrust regarding any improvements that we make. I urge you to hear from others in the community who have observed these improvements, and of course to visit the shelters yourself to see recent improvements. I can assure you that our staff and volunteers at all levels have been working long hard hours to not only provide care, but to open our doors to all levels of scrutiny, as requested. We've never turned down requests for information, or for reports, log reviews, public disclosure requests, or onsite tours. We've worked with a variety of animal care concerned parties, we've worked with people with no formal education or background in data analysis to understand our data and we've worked with a variety of veterinarians as we improved our medical protocols and rationale for medical decisions. And contrary to only one veterinarian report, we've opened our doors to those vets and many other volunteer veterinarians that have assisted us in a myriad of ways from advisors, to actual procedural help, and we very much appreciate that assistance. We plan on continuing to open our doors to anyone wanting to see for themselves our programs and most importantly our care of the animals.

I would like to conclude these comments today by leaving you with information for the record that you might not already have: I have two veterinarian reports from vets who have reviewed our shelter and operations, the PIMA Medical Institute letter, a euthanasia review report by Dr. Sharon Hopkins, my overview of our experience with the group of volunteer vets led by Dr. Brad Crauer; a pictorial and narrative in more detail of our recent improvements and this report in writing.

I can assure you that while RALS-KCACC is still the operating agency for animal services we will continue to provide care and move in a positive direction to meet the goals outlined in Motion 12737.